

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

In the Office Action dated April 1, 2009, Claims 1-8, 11, 12, and 20 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious in light of U.S. Patent No. 6,663,348 to Schwarz ("*Schwarz*") in view of U.S. Patent No. 4,846,048 to Hvilsted ("*Hvilsted*") in view of U.S. Patent No. 4,662,177 to David ("*David*") in view of U.S. Patent No. 4,474,537 to Dolz ("*Dolz*"). Claim 11 is also rejected under § 103(a) as being obvious in light of *Dolz* in view of *Hvilsted*. Claim 15 is rejected under § 103(a) as being obvious in light of *Schwarz* in view of *Hvilsted* in view of *David*. In response, Applicant has amended independent Claims 1, 11, and 15. The rejection of each independent claim is addressed below.

A. Examiner Interview

Applicant's attorney wishes to thank the Examiner for the telephonic interview held on June 25, 2009. In the interview, the parties discussed possible amendments to the independent claims and each parties' understanding of the prior art cited in the outstanding Office Action. The Examiner suggested that the Applicant consider amending the independent claims to more clearly recite the structure of the sealing joint and its relationship to the other features in the claims.

B. Rejection of Independent Claim 1 and Dependent Claims 2-8 and 20

As noted above, Claims 1-8 and 20 were rejected under § 103(a) as being obvious in light of *Schwarz* in view of *Hvilsted* in view of *David* in view of *Dolz*. In particular, the Examiner indicated on page 7 of the Office Action that *Dolz* disclosed screws 42 that created a joint in the recesses holding the protector, and "the protector 41 will be fixed between the screw heads 42 and the plate 21." In response, independent Claim 1 has been amended to recite that the valve plate further defines a recess in contact with the low-pressure environment and extends radially outwardly from the through-bore, and the sealing joint (e.g., a gasket according to various embodiments) is disposed adjacent a surface of the valve plate in contact with the low-pressure environment. At least a portion of the protector is fixed between the sealing joint and the recess defined in the valve plate. Applicant respectfully asserts that *Dolz* does not disclose a sealing joint as recited in Claim 1 as amended that is disposed adjacent a surface of the valve plate that is

in contact with the low-pressure environment or fixing at least a portion of the protector between the sealing joint and the recess defined in the valve plate. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests that the rejection of Claim 1 under § 103(a) be withdrawn.

Dependent Claims 2-8 and 20 depend from independent Claim 1 and include all of the recitations thereof. For at least the reasons discussed above with respect to Claim 1, Applicant respectfully asserts that dependent Claims 2-8 and 20 are patentable over the prior art. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests that the rejection of Claims 2-8 and 20 under § 103(a) be withdrawn.

C. Independent Claim 11 and Dependent Claim 12

As noted above, independent Claim 11 was rejected under § 103(a) as being obvious in light of *Schwarz* in view of *Hvilsted* in view of *David* in view of *Dolz* and in light of *Dolz* in view of *Hvilsted*. In response, independent Claim 11 has been amended to recite that the sealing joint is disposed adjacent the valve plate, and at least a portion of the protuberant ends are disposed between the recesses in the valve plate and the sealing joint. As discussed above in relation to independent Claim 1, Applicant respectfully asserts that *Dolz* does not disclose a sealing joint as recited in Claim 11 as amended that is disposed adjacent the valve plate or that at least a portion of the protuberant ends are disposed between the recesses in the valve plate and the sealing joint. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests that the rejection of Claim 11 under § 103(a) be withdrawn.

Dependent Claim 12 depends from independent Claim 11 and includes all of the recitations thereof. For at least the reasons discussed above with respect to Claim 11, Applicant respectfully asserts that dependent Claim 12 is patentable over the prior art. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests that the rejection of Claim 12 under § 103(a) be withdrawn.

D. Independent Claim 15

As noted above, independent Claim 15 was rejected under § 103(a) as being obvious in light of *Schwarz* in view of *Hvilsted* in view of *David*. In response, independent Claim 15 has been amended to recite that the protector includes protuberant ends configured such that outer surfaces of the protuberant ends are aligned with an outer surface of the valve plate, and at least a portion of the protuberant ends are disposed between the recesses and a surface of a sealing joint

Appl. No.: 10/527,395
Amdt. dated 07/01/2009
Reply to Office Action of April 1, 2009

that is disposed adjacent the outer surface of the valve plate. As discussed above with respect to independent Claim 1, Applicant respectfully asserts that the prior art does not disclose a protector that includes protuberant ends configured such that outer surfaces of the ends are aligned with an outer surface of the valve plate, and at least a portion of the protuberant ends are disposed between the recesses and a surface of a sealing joint that is disposed adjacent the outer surface of the valve plate. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests that the rejection of Claim 15 under § 103(a) be withdrawn.

E. Conclusion

It is not believed that extensions of time or fees for net addition of claims are required, beyond those that may otherwise be provided for in documents accompanying this paper. However, in the event that additional extensions of time are necessary to allow consideration of this paper, such extensions are hereby petitioned under 37 CFR § 1.136(a), and any fee required therefor (including fees for net addition of claims) is hereby authorized to be charged to Deposit Account No. 16-0605.

Applicant appreciates the Examiner's careful consideration of this application and would welcome a telephone conference with the Examiner to expedite the processing of the patent application. Applicant's attorney, Meredith Struby, may be reached directly at (404) 881-4626.

Respectfully submitted,

/Meredith W. Struby/

Meredith W. Struby
Registration No. 54,474

Customer No. 00826
ALSTON & BIRD LLP
Bank of America Plaza
101 South Tryon Street, Suite 4000
Charlotte, NC 28280-4000
Tel Atlanta Office (404) 881-7000
Fax Atlanta Office (404) 881-7777

ELECTRONICALLY FILED USING THE EFS-WEB ELECTRONIC FILING SYSTEM OF THE UNITED STATES PATENT & TRADEMARK OFFICE ON JULY 1, 2009.